

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5084

As Reported by House Committee On: Higher Education

Title: An act relating to postsecondary education and training support for former foster youth.

Brief Description: Establishing a foster youth postsecondary education and training coordination committee.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Early Learning, K-12 & Higher Education (originally sponsored by Senators McAuliffe, Hargrove, Kohl-Welles, Rasmussen and Regala; by request of Governor Locke).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 3/22/05, 3/31/05 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill (As Amended by House Committee)

- Expands the scope of responsibility and membership of an oversight committee on foster youth and education to include promotion of opportunities for postsecondary education and training for foster youth.
- Requires the Higher Education Coordinating Board to place a priority on former foster youth for receipt of financial aid awards under the State Need Grant program and the State Work Study program.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 7 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Fromhold, Hasegawa, Ormsby, Roberts and Sommers.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 6 members: Representatives Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Rodne, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Dunn, Jarrett and Priest.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

Beginning at age 13, dependent youth in state foster care can receive Independent Living Services to help them prepare for independence. When youth emancipate, or "age out," from

foster care at age 18, they are eligible to receive assistance with housing, education, and employment training until age 21. According to a 2003 performance report by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) Children's Administration, 470 youth aged out of foster care in 2002. Of these youth, 161 planned to pursue higher education.

In 2003, legislation was enacted creating an oversight committee composed of staff from the Children's Administration, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and advocacy agencies to develop strategies for maintaining foster children in the schools they were attending at the time they entered foster care. The committee also promotes best practices in education of foster care youth.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) administers state financial aid programs for low-income students pursuing higher education. The two primary programs are the State Need Grant and State Work Study. Students are eligible for a need grant if they have a family income less than 55 percent of the state median family income, are enrolled at least part-time, and pursue a degree or certificate. The program attempts to serve all eligible students within available funds. For the 2003-04 academic year, approximately 53,500 students received need grant awards, but 6,000 eligible students went unserved.

The State Work Study program served approximately 7,700 financially needy students in 2003-04. In its administration of the program, the HECB is directed to place a priority on state resident students, job placements that relate to the student's academic or vocational pursuits, and off-campus community service placements.

Summary of Amended Bill:

The membership of the Children's Administration oversight committee on education of foster youth is expanded to include the HECB, foster youth, former foster youth, and foster parents. The scope of responsibilities of the committee is expanded to include promotion of opportunities for foster youth to participate in postsecondary education or training.

The committee will:

- assess the statewide need among foster youth for assistance in pursuing postsecondary education and training;
- identify sources of funding to provide such assistance;
- review the effectiveness of existing activities and identify new activities to support former foster youth in pursuing postsecondary education and training; and
- review progress toward improving educational and vocational outcomes for foster youth.

The HECB, when making annual awards of State Need Grants, will give consideration to former foster youth. Eligible former foster youth are guaranteed a State Need Grant when funds from grants that were declined, forfeited or otherwise unused are disbursed. The HECB must also place a priority on providing work opportunities for former foster youth through the State Work Study program.

A former foster youth is defined as a person who is between 16 and 23 years old, was in foster care in Washington for at least six months since his or her 14th birthday, and enrolls in a Washington higher education institution within three years of high school graduation or General Equivalency Diploma completion.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill:

Rather than creating a new advisory committee on postsecondary education for foster youth, the scope of responsibility and membership of an existing oversight committee on education for foster youth are expanded. The definition of former foster youth is expanded to include youth aged 16 to 23 who have been in state foster care for at least six months since their 14th birthday, rather than youth at least 18 years but less than 24 years of age who aged out of state foster care at age 18.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support) It would be more efficient if an existing advisory committee were used to cover both postsecondary as well as K-12 education issues for foster youth. This would make sense not only from an administrative standpoint, but also would involve the right people and groups. It is important to consider the continuum of educational needs of foster youth. Foster youth continue to be under-represented in higher education and this bill would try to address some of their needs.

(With concerns) There are many vulnerable students who rely on the assistance provided by state financial aid programs. As an alternative to singling out one group over another, additional funding should be provided to ensure all eligible students are served.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board; and Laurie Lippold, Children's Home Society.

(With concerns) Nani Jackins Park, State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.